

DATE: February 27, 2003

TO: ALL STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONS

SUBJECT: Enhancement of the State's Civil Service Testing Activities

In a continuing effort to promote sound testing practices in the State's civil service, the five-member State Personnel Board (Board) recently took action on two items of great importance to the State's civil service testing activities. The purpose of this memorandum is to describe the items and the Board's action.

At its February 3, 2003, meeting, the Board approved the final report documenting the State Personnel Board's (SPB) review and evaluation of the State's decentralized testing program. The Board also adopted Article 3.5, Section 50 in Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations, which incorporates by reference the SPB's *Merit Selection Manual: Policy and Practices*, dated March 2003. Following are details of each of these items.

FINAL REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE STATE'S DECENTRALIZED TESTING PROGRAM

In compliance with a Board resolution adopted September 7, 2001, SPB staff conducted a comprehensive review and evaluation of the State's decentralized testing program. The year-long project evaluated the degree to which departmental testing efforts adhere to recognized legal and professional standards when identifying individuals for appointment in the civil service.

Through this evaluation effort, SPB staff concluded that the decentralized testing program could be improved. Further, while many departmental testing efforts were noted as representing sound selection, a number of program deficiencies emerged which, if left unchecked, threaten to erode the integrity of the State's testing program. To address these noted program deficiencies, a series of program improvement recommendations were included in the final project report and have been approved by the Board. The recommendations are directed toward improving the decentralized testing program through increased guidance, oversight, and support by the SPB in conjunction with documented expectations and standards for departmental staff engaged in decentralized testing activities. SPB staff is currently working on implementation of the recommendations, many of which will be completed by the fall of 2003. SPB staff will be communicating project status with stakeholders throughout our implementation efforts.

The final project report, entitled *The Status of the State's Decentralized Testing Program: Final Report of Findings and Recommendations*, documents the project methodology, as well as the data collection and analysis efforts from which the program improvement recommendations were developed. The report is available on SPB's Web site at www.spb.ca.gov/spbabt/reportsrd.cfm.

MERIT SELECTION MANUAL: POLICY AND PRACTICES

The *Merit Selection Manual: Policy and Practices* establishes policy and provides guidance to State agencies and departments engaged in testing and selection activities for the State's civil service. The *Merit Selection Manual* also documents professional best practices. The *Merit Selection Manual* is intended to ensure that examination-related activities are conducted consistently among agencies and departments on the basis of merit and fitness.

The *Merit Selection Manual* will be comprised of multiple sections addressing specific aspects of the State's civil service testing program, as well as a multitude of assessment-related topics. The *Merit Selection Manual*, dated March 2003, includes the first sections prepared thus far. Development of additional sections is currently underway. As additional manual sections are prepared, they will be released for incorporation in the manual. Current subscribers will receive the new *Merit Selection Manual* in early March 2003, and updates/revisions periodically thereafter. Agencies and departments that are not current subscribers are invited to contact Janice Langford of SPB's Policy Division at jangford@spb.ca.gov or (916) 651-7136 for subscription information.

In conclusion, the Board is committed to the pursuit of sound testing in the State's civil service. The Board recognizes that employment testing conducted soundly is a value-added human resources function which is advantageous in the short-term and the long-term for both employers and interested job applicants/candidates. The value of employment testing is its capacity to identify in a fair, objective, and cost-effective manner those individuals who possess the requisite qualifications to perform successfully on the job. We are encouraged by the Board's recognition of the significance of the departmental testing efforts. However, we acknowledge that employment testing is not an easy area in the Human Resources field to implement and maintain within an organization and that as a profession it requires specific knowledge and expertise. Thus, SPB stands ready to assist departments in their testing efforts and provide the necessary guidance and support to ensure the quality and integrity of the State's testing activities. Implementation of the recommendations identified for the decentralized testing program and the *Merit Selection Manual* are important steps in improving the State's testing activities. With the Board's support, it is incumbent upon all

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of us involved in testing activities to ensure that testing efforts within the civil service are sound, merit-based processes.

The SPB is looking forward to working with our stakeholders in ensuring an effective and efficient decentralized testing program. If you have questions regarding the study of the decentralized testing program or the *Merit Selection Manual*, please contact Shelley Langan, Manager, Special Projects, Policy Division at (916) 654-8538, TDD (916) 653-1498 or slangan@spb.ca.gov. SPB looks forward to working with all departments.

Walter Vaughn
Executive Officer